


A WAVE IN HER POCKET

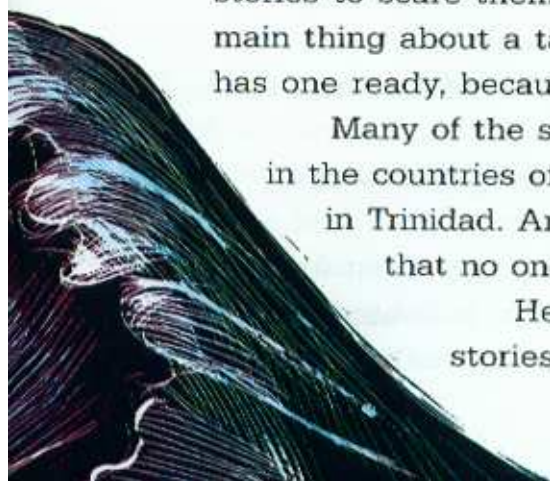


by Lynn Joseph • illustrated by Brian Pinkney

Almost all families in Trinidad have a tantie. A tantie is usually a grandaunt who helps to take care of all the grandnephews and grandnieces. She often gives advice to mothers on raising children even if she herself has no children. On family outings she entertains the children by gathering them all together and telling them stories. Sometimes she tells stories to teach them a lesson. Sometimes she tells stories to scare them or make them laugh. But the main thing about a tantie's stories is that she always has one ready, because any time is story time.

Many of the stories that tanties tell originate in the countries of West Africa. Others begin right in Trinidad. And some tanties make up stories that no one else has ever told before.

Here is one of my tantie's best stories, remembered forever.





One Easter holiday, Daddy decided to take the whole family on a trip to Toco. Toco is a beach on the northeastern tip of the island. My cousins and I had never gone there because it's not the best place for a sea bath.

"Too many rocks," said Uncle Rupert.

"And clumpy sand," said Auntie Hazel.

"And waves too big to jump over," added Mama.

Still, Daddy wanted us to go because Toco is one of the prettiest places to see.

We left early in the morning. The sun had just started lighting up the tops of the coconut trees. They looked like giant candles. Daddy packed up our car with Mama in the front seat, and me, Susan, and Cedric in the back.

Aunts and uncles and other cousins packed up their cars too. When everyone was ready, we drove off down the narrow pitch road, one behind the other like a trail of goats.

At first, Cedric, Susan, and I had plenty room in the backseat. But then Daddy pulled up in front of Tantie's home. The five other cars parked behind Daddy, filling up Tantie's empty street. Tantie sat waiting on her bright red porch.

"Where Tantie go sit?" asked Susan.

Nobody answered. We knew Tantie would pick the car *she* wanted to ride in. We watched as she climbed down her front steps slow slow. She was carrying a basket bigger than two of me. And she was heading for our car.

"Well, is now de backseat go get crowded," said Cedric.

"Shush," Mama said, as Daddy got out and helped Tantie in. She squeezed in between me and Cedric and placed her basket smack-dab on her lap



We could barely see each other over the big basket. I hoped Tantie would open it up and share out some black cake or plums. But Tantie sat there like she was at the movies, her two eyes staring straight ahead, as Daddy drove down the street.

"What wrong with Tantie?" Cedric whispered behind her head.

I shrugged.

Susan said, "Tantie, why you don't tell us a story?"

But for the first time ever, Tantie shook her head. "No stories today, dear."

Mama and Daddy were singing aloud to old calypso playing on the radio so I guess they didn't notice that Tantie was acting strange and looking sad. I decided to cheer her up, and Susan and Cedric must have had the same idea.

Susan said, "Look, Tantie," and pointed to a boy walking at the side of the road with five baby goats following him. But Tantie didn't even look.

Then Cedric said, "Tantie, I think I go win de marble-pitching contest at school." But Tantie didn't even say, "Good luck."

Then I said, "Tantie, you lived in Toco when you were little. It have plenty fun things to do there?" Tantie acted like she didn't hear a word I said.

Suddenly, Daddy rounded a bend in the road. We started driving down into a beautiful valley. The sea sprang up all around. It was sparkling like a blue Carnival costume. The waves were smacking the rocks with big kisses and then ducking back into the sea. The trees were green and spread out wide like fans. Even the rocks looked different here. They jutted out from the land like big, brown fishermen waiting to catch fish.



It seemed like all this prettiness woke Tantie up. She stopped sitting still and started looking around. She looked out Susan's window and smiled at the trees and the sky. She looked out the front window and smiled at the next hill coming up. Then she looked out my window where the blue sea was shining in the sunlight, and her smile disappeared clean off her face.

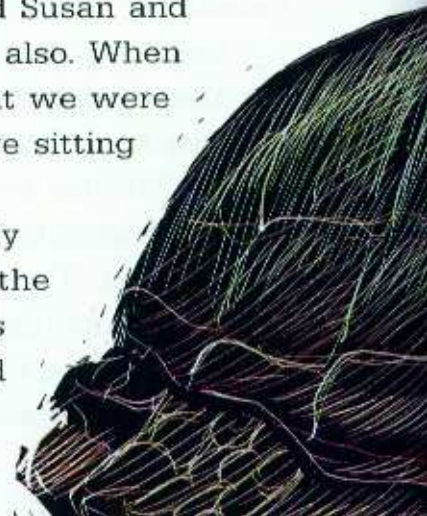
"Tantie, what's wrong?" I asked.

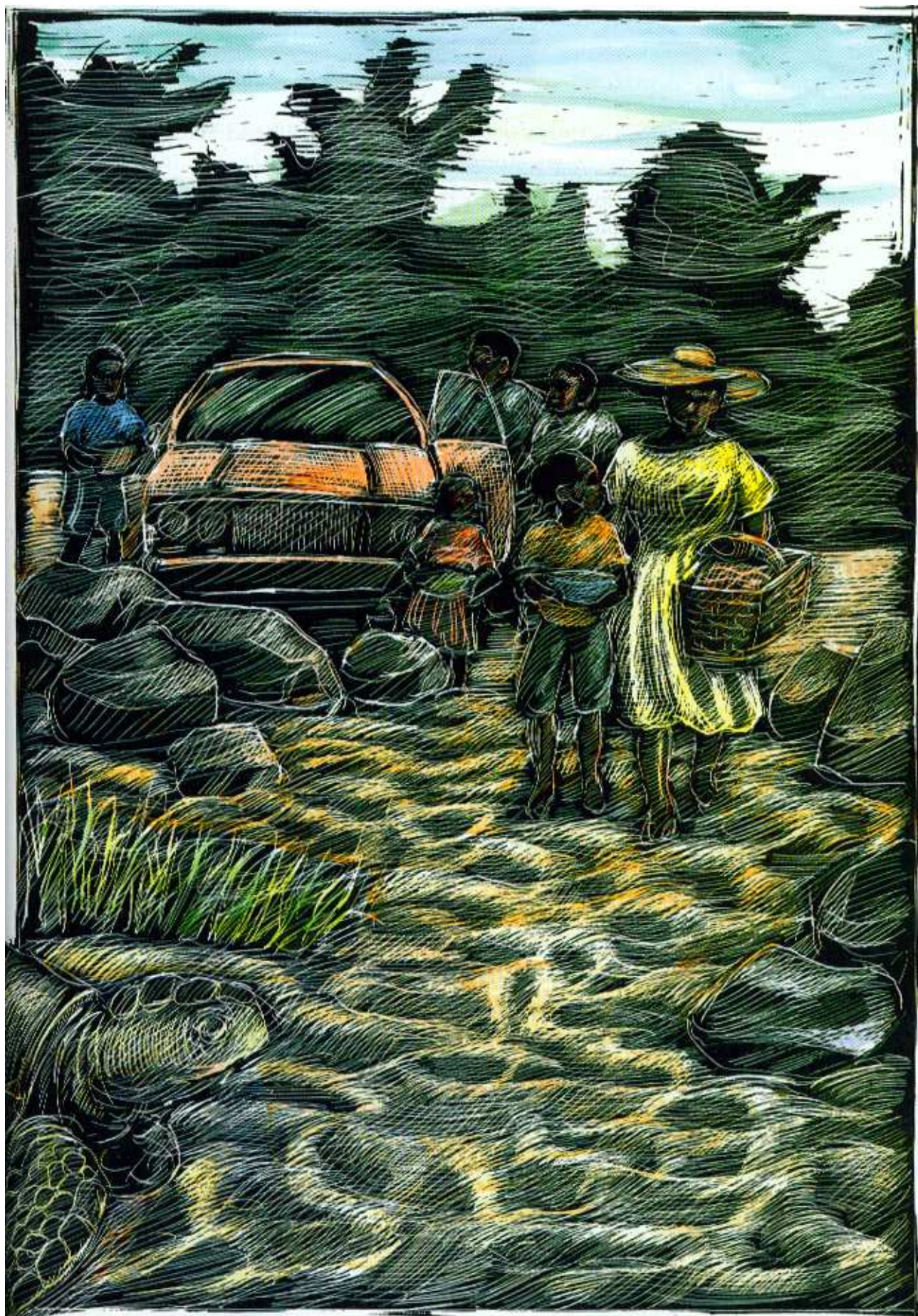
Tantie just stared and stared at the sea. Then the strangest thing happened. A tear rolled down her face. It was just me who saw. I didn't know what to do. I put my head on Tantie's shoulder and squeezed her hand real tight.

Daddy drove up and down one hill after another. Each valley was prettier than the one before. I didn't look at Tantie anymore but I could feel her staring out my window.

Finally, we reached Toco. The first thing I saw as Daddy parked the car was a huge turtle walking on the sand. His head was out of his shell and he was looking all around. When he saw us, though, he stuck his head quick quick back in his shell and sat on the beach like a rock. Tantie saw this and laughed. I laughed too, 'cause I was happy to see Tantie not sad anymore. Cedric and Susan and Mama and Daddy started laughing also. When everybody else arrived they thought we were a bunch of crazies because we were sitting on the beach laughing at a rock.

After a while Mama and Daddy and Auntie Hazel and the rest of the family gathered the picnic baskets and climbed over the rocks to find a good place to eat. I decided to







stay by the turtle to see if he'd stick his head back out. Tantie stayed too.

She sat down next to the turtle. "Hello!" she shouted, and bent her face close. I was sitting on the other side of the turtle. He was so big it looked like Tantie and I were at a table for two.

"Tell him hello," said Tantie.

"Hello, Mr. Turtle," I shouted and patted him on his hard old shell.

Then Tantie said, "He remind me of a story. Want to hear?"

I was so glad that Tantie had changed her mind about not telling any stories today that I couldn't answer. I just nodded my head and Tantie began her tale.

"A long time ago, a young girl lived by a deep blue sea like this one. She had brown skin like de rocks, long braids like de seaweed, and everyone said her eyes were like de midnight wave.

"This girl loved de sea and de sea animals more than anything else. She loved de seashells, and de starfish, de snails, and de sand dollars. She even loved de yellow sand crabs that no one else liked. Her favorite, however, was de big old turtles. She called them her grandfathers.

"These turtles came out only at night. During de day they hid themselves by de rocks so no one could see them. But de girl figured out a way. She climbed on top a tall, smooth rock that overhung de rocks where de turtles hid and she dropped small fish below. Then she waited on her rock and watched as turtle heads popped out to snap up de fish. Each day de girl took them fish to eat and after a while de grandfather turtles began waiting for her.



"As de girl grew older she began to love something even more than her grandfather turtles. Actually, it was someone. His name was Godfrey and he was a young fisherman. Every morning de girl stood on de beach and watched Godfrey set out in his little pirogue. And every afternoon she waited for him to pull in his nets.

"In her mind she said, 'Hello, Godfrey.' And in her mind he answered, 'Hello Delphine.' But she never said it out loud."

"Tantie," I interrupted excitedly. "Isn't Delphine your name too?"

"Yes, chile, it is," said Tantie. Then she went on.

"After Godfrey put his fish into big baskets and sold them to de village women, he tied up his pirogue and walked home. When he passed Delphine he smiled, and his face glowed like de sun.

"Delphine knew there was no one else like him. And she also knew that just like de waves would always come one after de other, she and Godfrey would be together forever."

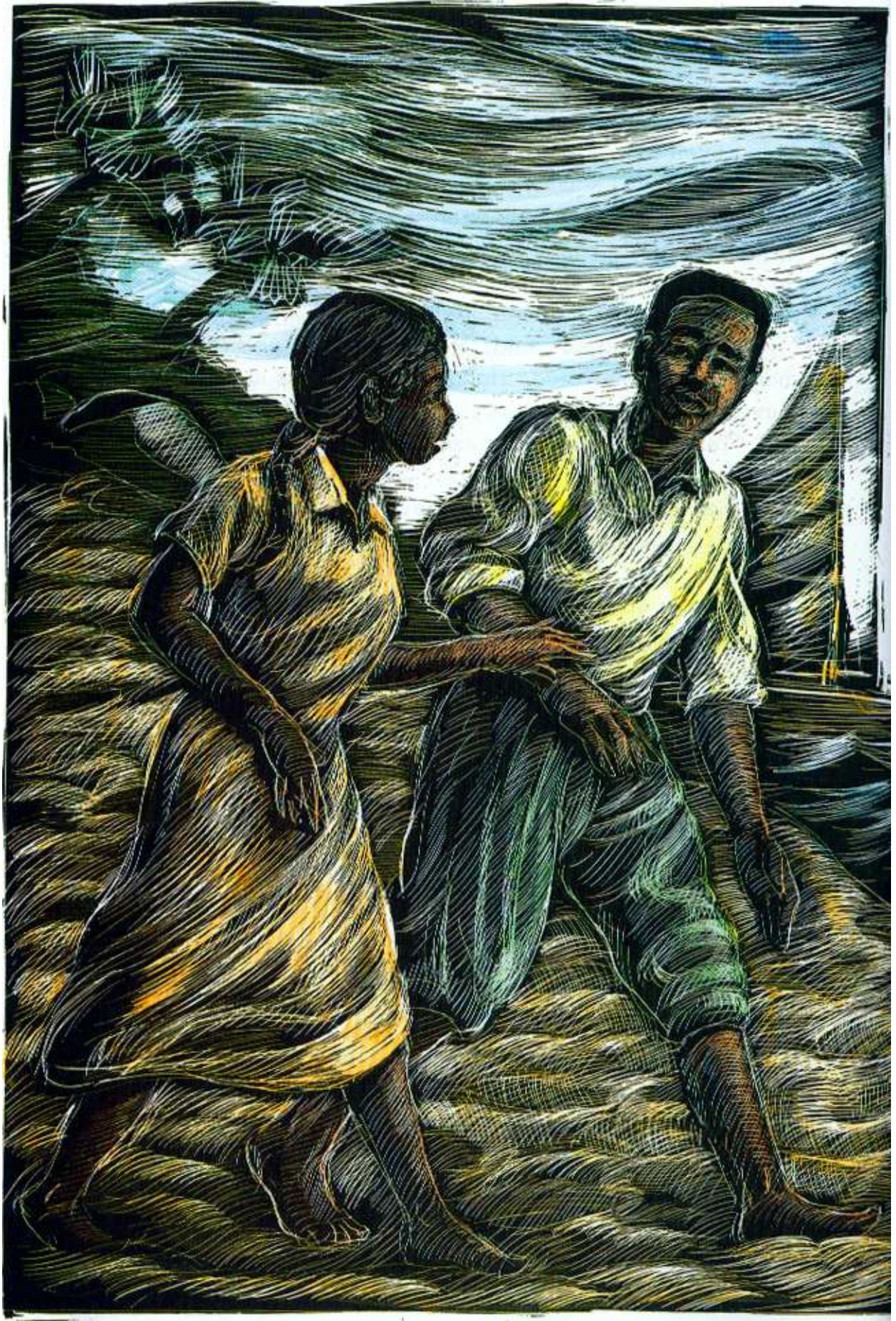
"Tantie," I interrupted again. "This not de kind of story you usually tell."

Tantie nodded her head. "I guess 'cause this not really a made-up one, chile."

"Whatcha mean, Tantie? It for true?"

Tantie only smiled and put her finger to her lips to shush me. Then she went on.

"One morning around this same time of year when de villagers were planning a big Easter celebration, Delphine watched Godfrey set out in his pirogue. But this time she felt a darkness deep down inside herself. She stepped up to him and, for the first time ever, touched his hand.





"'Don't go,' she said in her mind. She looked in his eyes and saw de sea. And his smile was better than de sun. But she couldn't say her words out loud. She stepped back and let him go."

"How come she couldn't talk?" I asked, forgetting all about Tantie's shush finger. "Was she scared that Godfrey wouldn't listen to her?"

Tantie smiled slowly. "Yes, I think that's why. Anyway, let me tell de rest of de story.

"That afternoon Delphine waited and waited for Godfrey to come back. She climbed on top her high rock and shaded her eyes from de sun. She looked and looked, but she couldn't see anything but waves.

"De next afternoon Delphine climbed on top her rock again. She waited and waited. She even forgot to feed de turtles. But Godfrey still didn't come. Every day she climbed de rock and looked at de sea for Godfrey. But only de waves looked back at her. Then one day as she stood on her rock, Delphine thought she heard de waves singing a song.

*"I'll marry my love, the deep blue sea,
And carry him in my pocket.
I'll marry my love
And carry my love,
A wonderful wave in my pocket."*

"Tantie, what that song mean? How can you carry a wave in your pocket?" I asked.

"That's what Delphine wondered, too," said Tantie. "She thought it was a song from Godfrey but she didn't know what it meant."

"Well, did she ever figure it out?" I asked, looking at the big waves splashing onto the sand.



"No," said Tantie sadly. "She never figured it out. After a while she stopped climbing de rock. And she moved far away to a town with plenty people, and streets instead of sand, and cars instead of pirogues. But especially no waves to sing that song to her."

Tantie looked out over the sea.

"Tantie," I said softly. "Are you de same Delphine in de story?"

Even though I had guessed it, I was surprised when she nodded her head. Poor Tantie. I listened to the waves hitting the sand until it sounded as if they were singing Tantie's song.

"Tantie, I think I know what that song means," I said slowly.

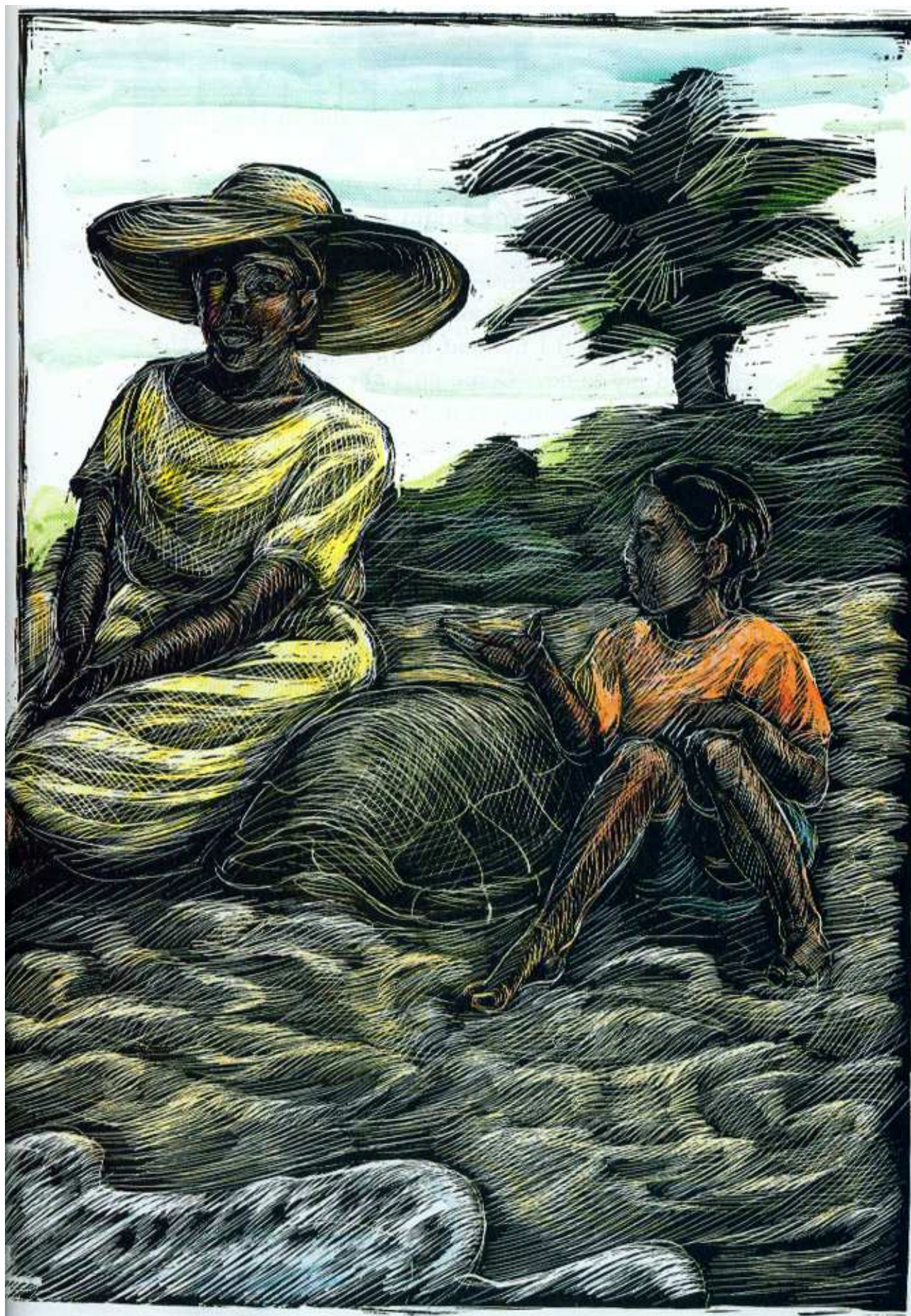
Tantie looked up at me with a funny expression on her face. Like she had forgotten I was there.

"Okay, Amber, tell me what it means," she answered. I could see her eyes were still far away.

"Well," I said. "De song says 'I'll marry my love, the deep blue sea, and carry him in my pocket.' And you said that you loved de sea *and* you loved Godfrey. Well, when Godfrey never came back from de sea, he was part of de sea. So, 'my love, the deep blue sea' means him, Godfrey." I patted the turtle on his hard shell and hoped Tantie was understanding me.

"Marrying someone means that person will always be right next to you, and carrying something in your pocket means de same thing. So, when de song said to marry your love and carry him in your pocket, it meant to keep Godfrey close to you always. Like in your heart, I guess." I glanced over at Tantie. "And it's a happy song, not a sad one, because it called Godfrey a wonderful wave in your pocket. So de sea was singing a song from Godfrey







to you saying to never forget him and to keep him close always."

Well, when I finish that long speech, Tantie's face was shining bright bright.

"Amber," she said. "You alone done figure it out." And she got up and gave me a big hug. I was so happy that I forgot sometimes I'm a little bit afraid of her and I hugged her back hard. Then she grabbed my hand. "Come on," she said. "Let's you and me go dip our arms in de water and give Godfrey de sea a hug. Then we go find your mama and them so we can eat!"

And that's just what me and Tantie did.



MEET LYNN JOSEPH AND BRIAN PINKNEY

Lynn Joseph was born in Trinidad, a Caribbean island nation. While still a child, she moved to the United States with her family but returned every summer to visit Trinidad. As a result, her childhood was filled with the music, food, and culture of that island.

Joseph, like many authors, weaves memories and details from her childhood into her writing. Joseph's family often went to Toco Beach, where "A Wave in Her Pocket" takes place. Joseph remembers hearing about people who rode the huge leatherback turtles there. "It was dangerous and rough, and I remember being told that sometimes the turtles took people too far out, and they drowned."

Joseph is also the author of a book of poetry titled *A Coconut Kind of Day: Island Poems*.



Brian Pinkney is the son of the artist Jerry Pinkney (who illustrated *The Talking Eggs*). Although he grew up watching his talented father work, he developed his own technique while in art school—the scratch-board technique used in the pictures in this story. In addition to children's books, Pinkney has done illustrations for newspapers and magazines.

